



ECKHART TOLLE

I was first introduced to Eckhart Tolle at the “Gathering 2000”, a two-day event in San Diego hosted by Inner Directions. A number of spiritual teachers were invited to make presentations: Ram Das, Lama Surya Das, Adyashanti, Rabbi Shapiro, Byron Katie, Krishna Das, Robin Rabin, Eckhart Tolle, and others. Five hundred people attended, and everyone seemed to enjoy the event immensely. It turned out to be a relatively light affair sprinkled with lots of humor and laughter which blended beautifully with the weighty topics of enlightenment and liberation.

Eckhart Tolle was scheduled to do his presentation close to the end of the second day. On the stage were two chairs. One chair was

over-sized, stuffed and inviting. All of the previous presenters used it. The other chair was a plain, straight-backed wooden model positioned for guests. Eckhart came out and sat in the wooden chair.

Eckhart's presentation lasted for approximately ninety minutes. His delivery was soft and clear. He adeptly articulated main points about "The Presence," the "Pain Body" and other terms referred to in his book, *The Power of Now*. He has an English/German accent and possesses a delightfully droll sense of humor. Eckhart was incredibly insightful as he took us through the mechanism of the mind and presented "the Now" in such a way that it became self-evident. When he finished speaking, the audience literally leapt out of their seats and applauded wildly. The audience's response seemed to arise not from what he said, but from his simple presence of Being. He was clearly an example of someone living in "The Now" and people immediately recognized it. It seemed as if the entire Gathering met in "The Now," and it was awesome. Afterward, Eckhart went outside the meeting hall and autographed his book. Long lines of attendees made their way toward him. He hugged them all. Many had tears of joy in their eyes.

When I arrived at the Gathering I wasn't sure who I wanted to interview. I had heard others ecstatically talk about Eckhart and his teachings, so I made arrangements to interview him the day after his presentation. After hearing him speak, I immediately bought his book, returned to my room and started formulating questions.

The hotel I was staying in was very close to where Eckhart had rented a room. I found myself at his hotel a bit early so I strolled along the shimmering shoreline for a few minutes reflecting on what he shared with us the day before. The simplicity and profundity of "The Now" was still lively in my awareness.

I interviewed Eckhart for nearly two hours. When we finished, I knew I had found someone who was exactly the kind of spiritual teacher I wanted to share with you. He is not well-known, yet exudes a tangible spiritual presence that is genuine, powerful and easily recognizable by many people. I must have said, "Wow!" to myself a dozen times a day for weeks after the interview when I put my attention on Eckhart and his teaching. Please welcome Eckhart into your life and through the "Power of Now" tap directly into your own essence.

This morning we are speaking with Eckhart Tolle. As a note of introduction, can you share with us where you grew up and how it impacted your outlook on life?

Yes. I was born in Germany, where I lived for the first thirteen years of my life. At age thirteen I moved to Spain to live with my father, who had gone to live there, and I spent the rest of my teenage years in Spain. So that became the second culture in which I lived. The second language for me became Spanish. At nineteen I moved to England. For most of my adult life until about five or six years ago, I lived in England. So the fact of having lived in two or three different cultural environments perhaps was important because I was not conditioned by just one particular culture. People who have lived exclusively in one culture, part of their mental conditioning is the cultural collective conditioning of that country. It probably helped to live in more than one country, so that the conditioning was not so deep. One became more aware of the surrounding culture without being totally identified with it.

Another interesting fact is that at the age of thirteen I refused to go to school any longer. It was an inner impossibility for me to go to school. I was not a rebellious child at all, but I simply refused to go to school. The environment was so hostile. I simply refused, and so between thirteen and twenty-two or twenty-three I had no formal education. When I went to live with my father in Spain—my father was a very unconventional person, which is wonderful—he asked me, “Do you want to go to school here?” I was thirteen. I said, of course, “No, I don’t.” And he said, “O.K. then don’t go to school. Do what you like; read, study languages, you can go to language classes.” And that’s what I did. I pursued my own particular interests. I read some literature. I was very interested in astronomy. I read books that I wanted to read. Of course I learned Spanish fairly quickly. I went to English language classes. I liked languages and studied some French. And I spent a lot of time just being with myself, free of the external pressures of the environment or the culture. So that was very important.

It was only later in England at age twenty-two or twenty-three that I became interested in intellectual matters. My mind became more and more active. I was seeking some kind of answer through the intellect, through philosophy, psychology, and literature. And I

believed that the answer was to be found in the intellect and philosophy. So that is when I started getting qualifications in preparatory evening classes that I needed to get into the university in England. That was my free choice and there was no internal compulsion behind it, nor external compulsion.

Did you study philosophy then or . . . ?

As a subsidiary subject, but it was mostly literature and languages that I later studied in the university. So the fact about my childhood is that schooling stopped at thirteen. There was this space of freedom between thirteen and the rest of my teen-age years. [Chuckles]

Interesting. Do you recall having any spiritual experiences as a child that created or brought about the “longing” to know yourself?

Well, my childhood was not a happy one. Spain perhaps was relatively more happy than Germany, the first thirteen years. There was a lot of conflict in my home environment, as many people find, of course. Even as a child I could already feel what later would become periods of intense depression—I could already feel the beginnings of that. That certainly was not a “spiritual experience” but somehow it can be a prelude to it. Even as a child I would sometimes think, “How can I eliminate myself from this world?” “How can I commit suicide?” and was working out possibilities of how to do it. [Laughter] Schooling was also so unpleasant for me. As a very young child I didn’t have the strength to say “No” to it. Basically life was not happy as a child. There was no “spiritual experience,” as such, except—yes, there was: although we lived in a fairly big city, I had a deep intimacy with nature. I remember getting on my bike and going beyond the outskirts of the city and looking around the world of nature, having just left behind the miserable world of school. And I remember the thought going through my head, “This will always be here, this will always be here.” Nothing—just that—and looking. [Chuckles]

Did you actually do any work after you had finished school?

Yes. My first job was at seventeen. I was a tourist guide. [Chuckles] We were living in Southern Spain where many tourists came. It hap-

pened naturally. So that was my first job there. And later when I moved to England, somehow, although I did not have qualifications, I was offered a job to teach German and Spanish in a language school which I did for over three years. [Chuckle]

One more event about “spiritual experiences.” When we were in Spain, I was about fifteen when a German woman came to visit us and then was going to return to Germany. She said, “Can I leave a few things with you?” She left some books with us. There were five books that were written by a German Mystic, early twentieth-century writer, not very well-known abroad. His spiritual name is Bo Yin Ra. I started reading these books. The text was written in almost Biblical style, pointing towards mystical experience. And I responded very deeply to those books. And I felt later that these books were left there for a purpose. I even copied parts of those books. They created an “opening” into that dimension. A year later she came back, and my father said to her, “So you left some books with us.” And she said, “No, I didn’t leave any books; I don’t remember.” She didn’t want him to remember that she had even left any books with us. [Laughter] So I still have some of these books at home, and I value them greatly.

Could you briefly share with us the main experiences you had that led you to become a spiritual teacher? You have a recently published book titled, The Power of Now: a Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment. In your book, you mentioned a very profound experience, or a “shift” that took place.

Yes. I was about twenty-nine, and had gone through years of depression and anxiety. I had even achieved some successes, like graduating with the highest mark at London University. Then an offer came for a Cambridge scholarship to do research. But the whole motivating power behind my academic success was fear and unhappiness.

It all changed one night when I woke up in the middle of the night. The fear, anxiety and heaviness of depression were becoming so intense, it was almost unbearable. And it is hard to describe that “state” where the world is felt to be so alien, just looking at a physical environment like a room. Everything was totally alien and almost hostile. I later saw a book written by Jean-Paul Sartre called *Nausea*. That was the state that I was in, nausea of the world. [Chuckle] And the

thought came into my head, “I can’t live with myself any longer.” That thought kept repeating itself again and again.

And then suddenly there was a “standing back” from the thought and looking at that thought, at the structure of that thought, “If I cannot live with myself, who is that self that I cannot live with? Who am I? Am I one—or two?” And I saw that I was “two.” There was an “I,” and there was a self. And the self was deeply unhappy, the miserable self. And the burden of that I could not live with. At that moment, a dis-identification happened. “I” consciousness withdrew from its identification with the self, the mind-made fictitious entity, the unhappy “little me” and its story. And the fictitious entity collapsed completely in that moment, just as if a plug had been pulled out of an inflatable toy. What remained was a single sense of presence or “Beingness,” which is pure consciousness prior to identification with form—the eternal I AM. I didn’t know all of that at the time, of course. It just happened, and for a long time there was no understanding of what had happened.

As the self collapsed, there was still a moment of intense fear—after all, it was the death of “me.” I felt like being sucked into a hole. But a voice from within said, “Resist nothing.” So I let go. It was almost like I was being sucked into a void, not an external void, but a void within. And then fear disappeared and there was nothing that I remember after that except waking up in the morning in a state of total and complete “newness.”

I woke up in a state of incredible inner peace, bliss in fact. With my eyes still closed, I heard the sound of a bird and realized how precious that was. And then I opened my eyes and saw the sunlight coming through the curtains and felt: There is far more to that than we realize. It felt like love coming through the curtains. And then as I walked around the old familiar objects in the room I realized I had never really seen them before. It was as if I had just been born into this world; a state of wonder. And then I went for a walk in the city. I was still in London. Everything was miraculous, deeply peaceful. Even the traffic. [Chuckle]

I knew something incredible had happened, although I didn’t understand it. I even started writing down in a diary, “Something incredible has happened. I just want to write this down,” I said, “in

case it leaves me again or I lose it.” And only later did I realize that my thought processes after waking up that morning had been reduced by about eighty to ninety percent. So a lot of the time I was walking around in a state of inner stillness, and perceiving the world through inner stillness.

And that is the peace, the deep peace that comes when there is no longer anybody commenting on sense perceptions or anything that happens. No labeling, no need to interpret what is happening, it just is as it is and it is fine. [Laughter] There was no longer a “me” entity, a “little me” that lives in resistance to what is.

After that transformation happened, I could not have said anything about it. “Something happened. I am totally at peace. I don’t know what it means.” That is all I could have said. And it took years before there was some “understanding.” And it took more years before it evolved into a “spiritual teaching.” That took time. The basic state is the same as then, but the external manifestation of the state as a teaching and the power of a teaching, that took time. It had to mature. So when I talk about it now to some extent, I add something to it. When I talk about the “original experience” something is added to it that I didn’t know then.

You mentioned that after a profound realization had occurred you read spiritual texts and spent time with various teachers. Can you share what writings and teachers had the greatest effect on you in further realizing what had been revealed to you?

Yes. The texts I came in contact with—first I picked up a copy of the New Testament almost by accident, maybe half a year, a year after it happened, and reading the words of Jesus and feeling the essence and power behind those words. And I immediately understood at a deeper level the meaning of those words. I knew intuitively with absolute certainty that certain statements attributed to Jesus were added later, because they did not “emanate” from that place, that state of consciousness, because I knew that place, I know that place. But when a statement emanates from that “place,” there is recognition. And when it does not, no matter how clever or intelligent it may sound, it lacks that essence and it does not have that power. In other words, it does not emanate from the stillness. So that was an incredi-

ble realization, just reading and understanding “beyond mind” the deeper meaning of those words.

Then came the Bhagavad Gita. I also had an immediate, deep understanding of and an incredible love for such a divine work. The Tao Te Ching; also an immediate understanding. And often knowing, “Oh, that’s not a correct translation.” I knew the translator had misunderstood, and knew what the real meaning was although I do not know any Chinese. So I immediately had access to the essence of those texts. Then I also started reading on Buddhism and immediately understood the essence of Buddhism. I saw the simplicity of the original teaching of the Buddha compared to the complexity of subsequent additions, philosophy, all the baggage that over the centuries accumulated around Buddhism, and saw the essence of the original teaching. I have a great love for the teaching of the Buddha, a teaching of such power and sublime simplicity. I even spent time in Buddhist monasteries. During my time in England there were already several Buddhist monasteries.

I met and listened to some teachers that helped me understand my own state. In the beginning there was a Buddhist monk, Achan Sumedo, abbot of two or three monasteries in England. He’s a Western-born Buddhist.

And in London I spent some time with Barry Long. I also understood things more deeply, simply through listening and having some conversations with him. And there were other teachers who were just as meaningful whom I never met in person that I feel a very strong connection to. One is [J.] Krishnamurti, and another is Ramana Maharshi. I feel a deep link. And I feel actually that the work I do is a coming together of the teaching “stream,” if you want to call it that, of Krishnamurti and Ramana Maharshi. They seem very, very dissimilar, but I feel that in my teaching the two merge into one. It is the heart of Ramana Maharshi, and Krishnamurti’s ability to see the false, as such and point out how it works. So Krishnamurti and Ramana Maharshi, I love them deeply. I feel completely at One with them. And it is a continuation of the teaching.

You mentioned that you have been a spiritual teacher for ten years now?

It is very hard to tell when I started to be a spiritual teacher. There was a time when occasionally somebody would come and ask me questions. One could say at that point I became a spiritual teacher, although the term did not occur to me then.

For awhile I thought I was a “healer.” It was a few years after the transformation happened. Occasionally people would come to me. I was sitting with a woman one day and she was telling me her story and I was in a state of listening, a state of bliss as I was listening to the drama of her story, and suddenly she stopped talking and said, “Oh, you are doing healing.” She felt something and she called it “healing.” And so at that time I did not understand completely what was going on, and thought, “Oh, so I am a healer.” For a while then, people called me a healer. [Laughter] And when I saw the limitations of that term, I dropped that. [Laughter] And later on, somebody called me a “spiritual teacher” once, and that must have been the beginning. [Laughter]

How long did it take after the “shift” to integrate what was revealed?

Many years. About ten years. And “spiritual teacher” of course is not an identity. “Spiritual teacher” is a function. Somebody comes, the teaching happens. Somebody leaves, there’s no spiritual teacher left. If I thought it was my identity to be a spiritual teacher, that would be a delusion. It’s not an identity. It’s simply a function in this world. I have been very happy being nobody for many years after the transition. And I was nobody even in the eyes of the world, really. I had not achieved any worldly success. Now, there is a book, and the groups are getting bigger and bigger. And people think I am “somebody.”

How do you deal with that?

Well, I smile. I still know I am “nobody.” [Laughter] Even though all these “projections” come that I am “special.” And for many teachers that is a challenge, to be bombarded with projections of “specialness.” And even teachers who have already gone very deeply sometimes fall back into illusion. The impact of projections that they receive from all their followers or disciples is so strong that after a while the delusion of “specialness” returns. And that is often the beginning of the end of the power of the teaching that comes through. They may then still teach from “memory,” but when the “specialness”

returns, that is the end of spiritual power coming through. Any idea of “specialness.” And I have seen it with spiritual teachers.

Yes, many times it has happened. What have you recognized in individuals who have come to you—and I don’t know if you would refer to them as “students”—and in yourself that would lead you to believe that your realization is “true” and that it can be realized by others?

The certainty is complete. There is no need for confirmation from any external source. The realization of peace is so deep that even if I met the Buddha and the Buddha said you are wrong, I would say, “Oh, isn’t that interesting, even the Buddha can be wrong.” [Laughter] So there is just no question about it. And I have seen it in so many situations when there would have been reaction in a “normal state of consciousness”—challenging situations. It never goes away. It’s always there. The intensity of that peace or stillness, that can vary, but it’s always there.

It often becomes more intense when there is an external challenge, if something goes wrong or there is a great loss externally. And then the stillness and peace becomes extremely intense and deepens. And that is the opposite of what usually would happen in the normal state of consciousness, when loss occurs or something goes wrong, so to speak. Agitation, upset, fear arises. Reactivity arises. “Little me” gets stronger. So this is the opposite.

I noticed it the first time I was watching a film not long after the transformation. It was a science-fiction film, and one scene showed the annihilation of Japan, the whole country going up in flames. And I was sitting in the cinema, feeling the bliss deepening and deepening, until there was only That. Then the mind came in and said, “How strange! How can you feel so blissful when you’re watching disaster?” And out of that, a realization developed into what would later become part of my teaching. That is, whenever a great loss of any kind occurs to anybody, loss of whatever kind, disaster, something goes drastically wrong, death, for some people that has been their spiritual breakthrough.

Loss is very painful, because any kind of loss leaves a hole in the fabric of one’s existence. A person dies, or something you had identified with completely is gone. Your home goes up in flames. There is extreme pain at first. But whenever a form dissolves, which is called

“death,” what remains is an opening into emptiness. Where the form once was, there’s a hole into emptiness. And if it’s not resisted, if you don’t turn away from it you’ll find that the formless—you could say God—shines through that hole where there was a form that died.

Maybe that is why the Buddhists spend so much time practicing in the graveyard?

Yes, that is right. I’m talking about this now in connection with my inner state, which is always the same although the intensity varies. And it intensifies through any loss or disaster. Has this knowledge become part of the teaching? Yes, because often people come to me because they are in great pain, because of some recent or imminent loss. They may be faced with death. They may have just lost a loved one, or lost their position. It’s often at that point that life becomes too unbearable, and then there is “seeking,” “spiritual seeking.” So I point out that if you surrender into the loss, see what comes through that hole. It’s the winds of grace that blow through that hole.

It’s interesting. When I first read about your “awakening,” I was reminded of St. John of the Cross and the “Dark Night of the Soul.” It seems like you have gone through something very similar. But what I heard you say yesterday at the Gathering (2000) is that it really isn’t necessary.

No.

The “Dark Night of the Soul” seems to be one way that some individuals have managed to have a “shift” in their consciousness. I hear you saying that there is another way. What I have experienced with other spiritual teachers is that almost to the person, they have gone through a similar shift. There has been a “dark night of the soul” and then the “shift” takes place. I have yet to find someone who has done it the other way, who has actually been able to have that realization and not go through “the abyss,” and has been able to help other individuals realize that it is not absolutely necessary.

Yes. One could say that everybody in this world has a spiritual teacher. For most people, their losses and disasters represent the teacher; their suffering is the teacher. And if they stay with that teacher

long enough, eventually it will take them to freedom. Maybe not in this lifetime. So everybody has a spiritual teacher. But a “spiritual teaching” in the narrow sense of the word is there to save time and suffering. Without it you would get there anyway, but it saves time.

And every spiritual teaching points to the possibility of the end of suffering—Now. It is true that most teachers have had to go through the “Dark Night of the Soul,” although for one or two it was very, very quick. Ramana Maharshi had one brief death experience. For J. Krishnamurti, it happened when his brother died. He [Krishnamurti] wasn’t “free” yet when they discovered him. There was great potential in him. But he really became “free” after the death of his brother.

Humankind as a whole has been through such vast suffering that one could almost say that every human has suffered enough now. No further suffering is necessary. And it is now possible as spiritual teachings are coming through with greater intensity, perhaps greater than ever before, that many humans will be able to break through without any further need for suffering. Otherwise I would not be teaching. The very essence of the teaching is the message, “You have suffered enough.” The Buddha said it. “I teach suffering, and the end of suffering,” which means, “I show you how suffering arises,” which is an important realization—I talked about that yesterday—and how you can be free of that. So that is the very purpose of spiritual teaching. Jesus says the same, “the Kingdom of Heaven is here, Now” accessible to you here and Now.

In your book, you mentioned that “enlightenment is simply our natural state of “felt” oneness with Being and a state of “feeling-realization.” Is enlightenment based on feeling rather than thinking? Help us understand who feels it and where it is felt.

Yes, well it is certainly closer to feeling than thinking. There is no word to describe the state of connectedness with Being. I am putting together two words in the book: feeling and realization hyphenated. Because there is not a correct word that I can use. Language doesn’t have a word for that. So I can only use something that gets relatively close but that’s not it either. Realization sounds a little bit as if it were a “mental” thing. “Oh, I know.” Feeling sounds as if it were an “emotion.” But it is not an emotion. And it is not a mental recognition of

anything. Perhaps the word that is closest to it is the realization of stillness, which is when the mental noise that we call thinking, subsides. There is a gap in the stream of thought, but there is absolutely no loss of consciousness. In that “gap” there is full and intense consciousness, but it has not taken on form.

Every thought in consciousness has been born into form, a temporary form and then it dies and goes onto another form. You could say the whole world is consciousness having taken birth as form, manifesting as form temporarily, and then dying, which means dissolving as form. What always remains is the “essence” of all that exists—consciousness itself.

Now, when a form dies, I pointed out earlier it is an external loss; it’s a great opportunity for the formless, pure consciousness to be recognized. The same happens when a thought-stream comes to an end. Thought dies. And suddenly that which is beyond thought—you may call it pure consciousness—is realized as deep stillness.

Now the question you may ask, and perhaps have asked, is, “Who realizes the stillness?” If there is no longer the personal entity there, who is it that becomes enlightened? [Laughter] One could say, of course, nobody becomes “enlightened,” because it is the dissolving of the illusion of a separate “me,” which is not anybody’s achievement, or anybody’s success. It looks as if there were a human being becoming enlightened, but that is an external appearance. What is really happening is that consciousness has withdrawn from its identification with form, and realizes its own nature. It is a “Self-realization” of consciousness. Therefore it is a cosmic event. What looks like a human being, a person, becoming free of suffering and entering a state of deep peace—from an external viewpoint—in reality is a cosmic event. Please remember that all language is limited, so these are just little “pointers.”

Consciousness is withdrawing from the game of form. For millions of years, as long as the world has been in existence, consciousness has been engaged in the play of form, of becoming the “dance” of phenomenal universe, “Lila.” And then consciousness becomes tired of the game. [Chuckle]

It needs a rest.

Yes. But having lost itself, that was part of the game. Having lost itself in form, after having lost itself in form, it knows itself fully for the first time. Don't take anything I say too literally. They are just little pointers, because no one can explain the universe through making "sounds" or thoughts. So it is far too vast to be explained. I'm not explaining the universe. These are just tiny hints. It is beyond words, beyond thought. What I am saying could almost be treated as a poem, an approximation, just an approximation to the Truth.

What is "enlightenment," and why does there seem to be so much confusion about it in these times?

Well, the confusion arises because so many people write about it without knowing it directly. One can become an expert on it without knowing it directly. Because an expert means you know a lot "about" something, but you do not necessarily know "it." Confusion arises there.

What is enlightenment? Again, it is so vast not any one definition would do it justice. It would be a tiny aspect of it. And you can look at it from so many perspectives, this one, that one, that one. And every time it looks as if it were different.

Another reason why it can be confusing is you reach one person's definition of enlightenment, he or she is looking from "this" perspective. And then you read somebody else's, and they are looking from that perspective. There's the ancient old Indian story of blind men describing an elephant, one touching the trunk, another a leg, the tail, and so on. [Laughter]

The confusion arises in trying to understand through the mind what enlightenment is. That is impossible. Any description is only a signpost. So the mind can only go a certain way, and then the signpost has to be left behind. And the mind gets attached to a signpost, which is a teaching or description, a concept. And then confusion arises because then it sees another signpost and says, "Oh, maybe that is the true one." It becomes defensive, identifies with "this one" and says that's me.

So, to the question, "What is enlightenment?" one could say simply, it is when there is no longer any identification with thinking. When there is no longer self-identification with thought processes and self-seeking through thinking. Then the compulsive nature of thinking ceases. Then gaps arise in the mind-stream. That means the

unconditioned consciousness arises and is realized as stillness or presence. There is nobody there who “realizes.” It is realized. It realizes itself. [Chuckle]

In your book you also mention the “observing presence.” Is it possible to practice being the observer to the point of recognizing it as your natural state or condition?

Yes. The beginning of spiritual awakening is the realization that “I am not my thoughts,” and “I am not my emotions.” So there arises the ability suddenly to observe what the mind is doing, to observe thought processes, to become aware of repetitive thought patterns without being trapped in them, without being completely “in them.” So there is a “standing back.” It is the ability to observe what the mind is doing, and the ability also to observe an emotion. I define “emotion” as the body’s reaction to what the mind is doing. The ability to “watch” that without being identified. That means your whole sense of identity shifts from being the thought or the emotion to being the “observing presence.”

And then you can observe a reaction, a mental or emotional reaction. Anger arises. The anger may still be there. But there is the observing “presence” which is the alertness in the background that watches the anger. So there is no longer a “self” in it. The ability to observe thought already is the arising of stillness. Because it is from that dimension that thought is observed.

And then the observer becomes stronger. And what is being witnessed has less heaviness to it, less momentum. So at first you are witnessing. Then you become aware of the witness itself, the power that lies in the witnessing, the power of stillness, the power of consciousness. And then you know that as yourself. You are That.

If you dwell in that continuously, it means you are free of the world of form. Until that happens you are imprisoned in physical and mental formations. You are trapped in thinking. You are trapped in emotions. You are a fictitious self trapped in form. The true self is beyond form and to know that is liberation.

I want to get into what is traditionally referred to as “Cosmic Consciousness,” where the Self, unshakable silence or Beingness is separate

from activity. There appears to be a maturity that takes place beyond “Cosmic Consciousness” where an awakening occurs to the reality that no separation between the Self and the world really exists. Adyashanti, who also spoke at the Gathering (2000) yesterday mentioned something about this “maturity” when he got into the three statements, “the world is illusion,” “Brahman is real,” and “the world is Brahman.” It appears a “maturation time” is required, but in some sense no time is necessary. How does this come about?

Well, certain sages made the statement, in India, especially, “the world is unreal,” and of course when people read it, it becomes a belief, and they repeat the belief, and then they argue with others who say, “No, no it is real, can’t you see it is real?” Those who made the statement originally and where it came from—I know exactly why they said it. Because I feel exactly the same.

The way I experience the world, it’s like a surface phenomenon. There’s such vastness of Being, the stillness is so all-encompassing. It fills almost everything, it fills the whole space and yet it is empty. And anything that happens, events, or phenomena in people, are like ripples on the surface of Being. That’s how I perceive. And ripples, they come and go. They are not all that real. No ripple or wave has any separate existence from the whole. It just looks for a moment as if the wave or ripple was a separate entity. But it isn’t.

So the whole phenomenal world to me is like a ripple on the surface of Being. And in that sense I could say, although I never say it as such, “the world is unreal”—unreal relative to what I know to be true, what I feel, what I experience. Experience is not the right word, because it implies time. So it is to be rooted in that timeless state of consciousness, because it’s only in the phenomenal world where time arises. And there is what looks like an entity, a “person,” that exists simultaneously as form in time, and yet is the formless. So there is a paradox coming in whenever one realizes. As form you are still in time. As the formless you are beyond time. So the formless, the unmanifested, shines through you when you have realized the formless. It shines through the form into this world. It’s like God shining through. The form becomes transparent.

You see this in anybody who has “realized,” the absence of personality or ego. There may be certain traits of behavior, but they are

not ego. It is the absence of needing to be somebody. And then it can take time as it did in my case, for this to become a teaching. Ramana Maharshi also went completely into the formless, into Being, and didn't even speak anymore, and didn't feed himself anymore. And then time passed on the "external," not within—he was rooted in the timeless. But on the external, time passed and as things changed, he started eating and feeding himself again. He started interacting with people. He started to speak again. And then the teaching arose out of that. Time was needed for that to happen.

So there is a role for "time" to act as "grist for the mill," which allows for that union between the unmanifest and manifest to come about?

Yes. There is always a paradox when one talks about time in the context of "spirituality." There's a question that is sometimes asked, "Do I need time to become enlightened?" Because it does seem like that. And the answer is yes and no. The answer I would give to that contains a paradox. And I say, yes, you need time until you realize that you don't need time anymore. [Laughter] So the truth here, it is only through paradox that this truth can be expressed. And to do away with paradox would limit it.

How do you define the term "ego?" Is it possible to have any remains of an ego and be perfectly enlightened?

Ego means self-identification with thinking, to be trapped in thought, which means to have a mental image of "me" based on thought and emotions. So ego is there in the absence of a witnessing presence. There's the unobserved mind and the unobserved mind is the ego. As the witness comes in, ego still operates. It has a momentum that is still there, but a different dimension of consciousness has come in. The question whether somebody can be enlightened . . .

Yes, is it possible to be perfectly enlightened and have any remains of an ego?

Well, perhaps not perfectly enlightened, but there can be remains of ego still there, because I have seen it in teachers. I have seen the ego return in some teachers. So the ego can go into almost a "coma," [Laughter] and then wake up out of its coma perhaps due

to the projections, ego-projections that the teacher is bombarded with. As the teacher is there, more people appear and gather around the teacher. And they (those who gather around them) all have their own ego-projections. They make the teacher very “special.” And specialness is always ego, whether special in my misery or special because I am the greatest, the ego doesn’t really mind. [Chuckle] So perhaps in those teachers the ego was not completely gone. It just had been reduced to an extremely weak state, but then gained strength again.

Ramakrishna refers to a “provisional ego,” where there is a very thin line between that which is real and that which exists in time/space which allows some sort of presence in the world. I think he said something like fifteen out of sixteen particles are not there in an ego form, but it’s that one-sixteenth of a particle left over that is able to interact with those who are still in possession of an ego.

Yes, that’s good.

Some spiritual teachers advocate spiritual practices and others reject them as a waste of time. What’s your perspective on this?

There may be a place for spiritual practice. The difficulty with spiritual practice is again that most practices give you “time.” They are based on time and on becoming, or “getting good at” something. In the end every practice will have to be left behind. No practice can take you to liberation. That is important to know. It can be a little step that is useful until you realize you don’t need it anymore, because after a certain point it becomes a hindrance.

Now if a teacher gives you a practice, he or she would perhaps point out when you don’t need it anymore or you realize yourself when you don’t need it anymore. No technique can take you there. That is the important thing.

Personally, I don’t teach practices as such. The power of the teaching is sufficient without needing to go for any practice. Although some people when I speak of awareness of the “inner body,” call it a technique. I would not call it a technique because it is too simple for that. When the oak tree feels its roots in the earth, its connectedness with the earth, it is not practicing a technique. That is its natural state,

to feel that connectedness. So I would not call “feeling the inner body” a technique.

Surrendering to “what is” or “the Now” seems to be an important aspect of your teaching. Is there a distinction between “surrendering to what is,” and the use of the popular cliché, “go with the flow of life, where ever it takes us”?

Surrendering only refers to this moment, whatever “is” at this moment—to accept unconditionally and fully whatever arises at this moment. “Going with the flow” is a more general term. For some people it is an excuse for not taking action and it refers usually to one’s life situation. Let’s say you are in a particular job and that is the flow, you stay in it.

Surrender is only in reference to Now. So “going with the flow” is not necessarily true surrender and may lead to passivity, lethargy and inaction. Surrender to the Now is something very different because it only concerns accepting the reality of this moment. Whatever action is needed will then rise out of that state of complete acceptance. The most powerful state for a human to be in is the state of embracing completely the reality of what is—Now. It is to say “Yes” to life, which is now and always now. There is a vast power in that “Yes,” that state of inner non-resistance to what is. Action arises out of that if it’s needed, as a spontaneous response to the situation.

So surrender to Now never leads to inaction because it only concerns the reality of this moment and perhaps action is needed. In the book I give the example of being stuck in the mud. So you wouldn’t say, “O.K., I surrender to this and I’m going to stay here.” It simply means, “it is;” there is a recognition of “it is” and to saying yes to “it is.” And there’s much greater power now that arises that will move through you and manifest as action if it is needed than there could ever be in the state of saying, “no” to “what is”—and then perhaps taking action that is always contaminated with negativity. Whenever you say “no” and then action arises because you are fighting “what is,” that is karmic action in Eastern terms, and it leads to further suffering because it arises out of suffering, which is the non-acceptance of “what is”—suffering. Action arising out of suffering is contaminated with suffering and causes further suffering, and that is karma. Action

that arises out of a state of “acceptance” is totally free of karma. And there is a vast difference.

In the Bhagavad Gita it says in Sanskrit “Yogastha Kuru Karmani,” which translated means “Established in Being, perform action.” I think this is what you are referring to.

Yes that’s exactly what it is.

By becoming a “watcher,” which is a term that you use, or “observer,” are we to dis-identify with the world in order to become free of it all, of its pain and suffering? This may be interpreted as escapism in some fashion.

“Watching” is mainly an internal process. You are watching whatever arises within, a reaction, an emotion, a thought. Or sometimes it will manifest already as behavior, and then you watch the behavior. It refers simply to being aware of whatever arises within and being a “witness.” There is no further attempt to achieve any state when you are the watcher. You are not the watcher in order to become detached from the world. There is no further aim.

Being the watcher is an end in itself. It is not a means to an end. If it were a means, you would be saying, “I need to get to the state of being detached from the world,” and you would be creating a future state to be achieved. You would become unhappy because you would realize you are not yet detached from the world. You would project an image of a “perfect self,” detached from the world, and you would want to get there. You would not be there. Continuous conflict would arise.

It would then be an agenda coming from the ego, wanting to be separate, wanting to be special?

Yes. And so it is the acceptance of “what is” that is part of the “watching.” You can’t watch completely without at the same time accepting completely.

I point out with reference to acceptance, that if you can accept whatever arises externally as a situation, or an event, or a person, then there is no reactivity, no negativity. Life becomes very, very simple.

If you cannot accept “what is,” some reaction will arise as an emotion, a judgement, an inner saying “no.” But even here, you can

now practice “Level Two” of acceptance. If you missed the first opportunity, which is to accept what arises externally, if you missed that and some reaction came up, then you can still watch the reaction. So your second opportunity of surrender is simply surrender to what arises within you, the emotion, the reaction. Watch that and accept that. “There’s anger here.” Accept the anger. Of course, the anger arose because you couldn’t accept something that was “out there,” i.e., “This shouldn’t be happening, life shouldn’t be like that.” But that was an unconscious reaction, so you missed that one. So now accept the inner. If you can’t accept the outer, accept the inner. [Chuckle]

It’s the benevolence of Truth! [Laughter]

Yes. One man called it Plan A and Plan B. [Laughter] And then he asked, “Well, if there is Plan A and Plan B, is there a Plan C in case you miss B?” And I said, “well yes, Plan C is enjoy the suffering.” [Laughter]

You mentioned in your book that women are closer to enlightenment than men, yet historically there seem to have been more men than women who have been recognized as enlightened beings.

Yes, that seems to be the case, although I suspect that there have been enlightened women who remained almost completely unknown because they lived in patriarchal societies where women had inferior status.

In many traditions, such as Buddhism, women seem to have become gradually more and more excluded. What seems to have happened is that the male teachers saw that any gain in consciousness women achieved—the arising of presence—tended to be lost again at the time of menses. As I explain in the book, the collective female pain-body becomes activated at that time and tends to pull women into unconsciousness. And so the teachers said, “Well, all a woman can hope for is to be reborn as a man in the next lifetime. Because obviously it was not working.”

But there is far greater consciousness coming in now, and especially through women. The very thing that was the obstacle—the collective female pain-body and the fact of menses—can now help bring about the awakening of consciousness in women. Perhaps the ancient alchemists already saw that possibility, because in alchemy a compar-

ison is drawn between a base metal being transmuted into gold, and the action of the menses.

So this is why I talk in the book about how to bring “presence” into that time when women would usually be pulled into unconsciousness and identification with the pain-body—to become very alert at that time even before it is likely to happen—very alert, very present and begin to watch the whole movement and stay present when this powerful movement of collective female pain-body comes in. And stay present throughout, because the pain-body can be a great teacher for “presence.” I say use that time and bring “presence” into it.

And I can see already that there are always more women than men coming to consciousness groups. Sometimes it is seventy percent women. And I can see how consciousness is now emerging very rapidly through women. Also because they are more in touch with the body. That helps.

And the feeling level.

Yes, because underneath the feelings is the stillness. So all you need to go is a little bit deeper. If you are stuck in the “head,” then you first have to go down into the emotions. It’s not easy to get out of the “head.”

It’s another step, then.

Yes.

How would men go about creating an opportunity like that in the pain-body? Maybe their favorite football team is losing and they can drop into it every time their team is not doing well? [Laughter]

Both men and women have “pain-bodies.” Both men and women are identified with the mind. But the emphasis for women is to work with the pain-body. The emphasis for men is to work with identification with mind and thinking. The other always comes in also. These are just the respective focal points.

If time is an illusion, as you mentioned in your book, then does this mean that nothing real has ever happened within the realm of time?

Yes.

Is this a correct interpretation?

That depends on how we use the word “real.” All the world of phenomena—every phenomenon in this world, whatever it may be, any event, anything that exists, its existence is fleeting. Everything that happens in time is very fleeting. Yesterday you were at the conference—that’s gone. Where is it now? You came in through this door an hour ago—that’s gone. If you could see this room, if you could see a speeded-up film of what is going to happen to all the objects in this room over a period of time, say two or three thousand years—when condensed into one minute, you would see it becoming dust, crumbling to dust and then nothing. Gone.

So the whole world is moving continuously into nothingness. It comes out of nothingness. It moves back into nothingness. It’s a fleeting [swishing noise]—gone. If you are rooted in no-form—the formless which is timeless, birthless, deathless, eternal, the stillness out of which everything comes—from there the whole world is quite unreal. But it is very real if you do not know that dimension; the world of birth and death is all there is. It holds great promise, because it promises you fulfillment at some point. At the same time it is a threatening place. So you are trapped in the world of form, torn between desire and fear.

What would enlightened relationships look like as compared with the usual psycho-social circumstances we see today?

The need for drama is gone. The need for conflict is gone. It’s important to realize that the “little me,” the egoic entity needs conflict. So as long as that operates, no relationship is free of conflict and drama. The pain-body loves drama because it feeds on pain. As I explain in the book, pain-bodies are dormant for a period of time, but they cannot remain dormant forever because they need to feed on the experience of pain.

So the pain-body rises up into the mind and feeds on your thinking. It becomes aligned with it. The pain-body is old pain, human pain, partly collective—partly personal. It lives in you. Even if you accept every moment as “it is” and so create no further pain, you will still be faced with the pain that has accumulated from the past. That is the pain-body and it will periodically come up and attempt to feed

on your mind—negative thinking, destructive thinking. And it will attempt to feed on somebody else's reaction. And that happens in almost every intimate relationship. Pain-bodies periodically become active and that is the need for drama and conflict in a relationship. Because the pain-body loves it. And then it feeds on the other person's reaction. It pushes the right buttons and feeds on reaction.

When the pain-body is no longer there, i.e., it has been transmuted by bringing “presence” into it, the very life-energy that was trapped in the pain-body becomes now freed. The very pain that was there turns into presence. It is like a fire. Consciousness transmutes everything into itself. Then there is no need for drama. There is no need for conflict. Love can then flower in the relationship as a continuous state.

In some spiritual teachings it is said that the Self, Being or Truth unfolds Itself to Itself by Itself. Is it possible then to hasten the process of liberation by “doing” anything, or is it just folly to think that by “watching” our mind as a function of “doing”—it will happen quicker?

There is no “doing.” You can't really get there by “doing” anything. But can you speed it up? Yes. The need for time disappears when you realize the significance of embracing this moment as it is. You are not “doing” anything. You are simply allowing this moment to be. That speeds it up because then you don't need time anymore. It speeds it up so much that the whole need for time is gone. [Chuckle]

You mentioned in your book that “transformation is through the body, not away from it.” Does that imply that the formless makes itself known through the form of the body, which by its nature is constantly changing and not ultimately real?

That's right. Within every illusion there must be something real, because even the illusion could not exist without some reality somewhere, which then turns out to be consciousness itself appearing as the body. So look for the real that is concealed within that fleeting phenomenon we call “body.” And to go beyond the appearance of consciousness, you can simply feel the inner-body as emanating presence within you, and so go beyond the form of body, to its formless essence.

Is the inner body the unmanifest aspect of the body?

Yes. That is the doorway. You go through the body. The doorway into the unmanifested is through the inner-body.

How would you like to be seen as a spiritual teacher and what is the proper relationship to you for a student?

I have no view on that. Every moment is simply as it is. People come. When I interact with people I am a spiritual teacher. When they leave me, the very moment somebody leaves, I'm no longer a spiritual teacher because that is only a temporary function. Somebody comes, the teaching happens. So I don't see myself as a teacher. Being a teacher is not an identity, but a function. I would never see myself as a teacher, so I have no view of how I would want to be seen. Because it's only a temporary function.

The moment I am alone in the room, there's no spiritual teacher left. It only arises when somebody comes. So beyond that there is nobody. There's no spiritual teacher.

When you assume the role as a spiritual teacher and someone comes to you for guidance, how would one best approach you to maximize the opportunity for full realization?

Whenever anybody comes, I completely accept the way they are. If there's unconsciousness of any kind, pain-bodies, people come with pain-bodies. I cannot say that they should be this way or that way. They are as they are at that moment, and I completely accept the way they are as they sit there in front of me. That's the way they are. There's complete acceptance. I never say, "When you come to me you should behave like that or do that." Just be there and that is enough. Everything else arises out of that deep sense of acceptance, which is "presence." Whatever needs to happen in the teaching situation then happens. There is no further need for anybody to try to do something or be somebody or behave in a certain way.

If students decide that they would like to start bowing to you and wash your feet or do those kinds of activities with you, would you be accepting of that?

Well, it has happened. Some Indian people came to see me and did that. And I accepted that because it's so normal for them. It's part

of their culture. And also one or two Western people who spent many years in India have done that. But so far no other Western person has done it, except those who have had a very, very strong association with India.

Or maybe with Christianity, because it is part of that tradition also. So it could happen in a Western sense?

Yes.

And you would be O.K. with that?

It's impossible to say until it happens.

O.K. [Laughter]

I have sent people away sometimes when I feel there is an excessive attachment. I have sent people away who I feel need to spend a period of time away so that an excessive attachment is not formed to the form of the teacher. So that happens. But I don't have any kind of mental framework on it. It all happens spontaneously.

There is a particular form of spiritual teaching called "crazy wisdom." It sometimes manifests as a difference between what someone says and their actions. Sometimes "crazy wisdom" teachers use it as a teaching technique or method. Zen teachers use a stick, which appears to be physically abusive, but it may not be. Other teachers use sexuality in a "different" form where it would be with more than one woman, or it might be with someone outside of a marriage. Can you help us understand what this is about and how it fits or doesn't fit with your teaching?

Well, on the one hand, the mind may have a certain image of how a spiritual teacher should behave, but that may not have very much to do with reality. So to have certain expectations of how a teacher should behave and then find that the teacher's behavior does not conform to those expectations, that can often happen. And then either the student would leave or would have to re-examine expectations or become aware of their mental expectation of how a teacher "should" behave. Those expectations are almost certainly wrong, because they come from mind and from ego.

On the other hand, it can happen that certain spiritual teachers,

when ego reasserts itself, that they abuse their position. And usually you will find that there comes a discrepancy between what they say they are and what they do. And when that's discovered it has nothing to do with a mental expectation of how a teacher should behave. You're simply watching whether there is a discrepancy between the teaching, or what the teacher says, and the behavior of the teacher. For example, the teacher might say, "I've been celibate for my whole life, for the past thirty years." And then somebody discovers the teacher in bed with someone. [Chuckle] There you have a discrepancy in the teaching and the teacher's actions.

And I know certain people may have the expectation, the mental image, that a spiritual teacher must be celibate. That of course is not the case. Although I have been celibate for several years, I have never said that celibacy is the way. I have never said that, I've never said that I'm going to be celibate for the rest of my life. I may be. I may not be. It makes no difference to the teaching. But if I said, "Celibacy is the way," and then turn around and not be, that's where the delusion starts and the deception begins to creep in which has to do with ego. So simply to watch out for that—a teacher could have relationships with women or men or whatever. But if there's no discrepancy between that and the teaching, then that's how it is.

Sometimes it's very difficult to identify a genuine spiritual teacher. What should a person look for? It could be that the teacher is really breaking boundaries and moving in an unorthodox manner into the boundless. On the other hand, there could be extreme deception. There have been examples in the past where a teacher has said, "I am not what I teach," and they teach in a crazy fashion. In the same manner they might give a "teaching lesson" that appears to have nothing to do with who they are in their essence. What perspective should be employed by those who are faced with this challenge?

People feel naturally drawn to certain teachers. Even that is not necessarily the best indication that that teacher is right because there may be—the ego may feel drawn to a very big ego in a teacher, or to the glamour associated with a big ego in a teacher. But if that is the case, there would be no point in saying to this person, "don't go there," because that is what's happening.

So any teacher you are drawn to is ultimately the right teacher, even if it is the wrong teacher. If you are drawn to a teacher with a big ego, that's because there is a lot of ego in you, and that ego feels bigger in the presence and association with the bigger ego and in that, feels bigger itself. And then the bigger the ego gets, the more suffering will appear. And that will be the teaching and the teacher. So in some way you could say any teacher you feel drawn to is the right teacher for you at that time, even if the teacher is wrong.

What is the single most important summary statement you can make for those interested in realizing liberation in this lifetime?

Liberation means the end of seeking, the end of time. Do you believe that you need more time to get there? That's the perpetuation of the illusion. You don't need any more time when you allow this moment to be as it is. The only difference between you and the master is that the master lives in complete alignment with what is. The Now is welcomed instead of resisted. Allowing this moment to be as it is, that's the key. If you are not ready for this act of surrender, then that's fine too. You need more time and you need more suffering that's inseparable from time. And eventually you will reach that point anyway. Eventually you will realize that liberation does not require time. Liberation is from time. Or realize it Now and you are free Now.

A delusional aspect that might jump into this situation is when someone says to themselves, "I don't realize liberation in this moment, so I need more time to 'create' more suffering which will speed things along." This may simply be an egoic activity which takes the form of self-flagellation.

Yes. Well, that's been done in the past within the context of religions, Medieval Christianity. Sometimes also in Hinduism they practice that. It doesn't work because it is an ego-induced activity. And that kind of suffering actually strengthens the ego. Because the ego gains strength; it's created it. There's enough suffering in anybody's life. It's quite enough. You don't need to create it, because that would be strengthening of the ego.

Your teachings are gaining quite a bit of popularity these days. Do you see yourself getting involved with more travel to different places and possibly setting up a main center or location for your teaching?

Yes. If a center happens—I will not go out and create a center. But if it comes into being naturally and spontaneously, then that may be a good thing.

It's something you would accept?

Yes. And the traveling, also. There's already a lot of traveling and maybe some more to come. But I will always have periods when I don't travel and allow some time for writing.

Aside from book sales, how do you support yourself and your teachings? Do you charge at public meetings or for personal counseling sessions?

Yes, there is a charge for meetings and groups. And I rarely do counseling sessions these days. It's mostly group work.

Eckhart, thank you very much for your time. It's been great talking with you today. And I'm looking forward to getting with you again in the future.

O.K. Thank you. Thank you.

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